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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: NCP REFUSAL TO ATTEND ADDIS MINISTERIAL  
WITH SECRETARY RICE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Khartoum daily newspapers reported December 5 the refusal of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to accept the Secretary's invitation to meet in Addis Ababa, adding that the NCP "does not object" to the American effort. All reports noted that the SPLM had accepted the U.S. invitation. The government-sponsored media expressed "regret" that President Bashir and his deputies are too busy in Khartoum dealing with pressing national issues, including implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the very subject of the Addis meeting. Opposition papers said the U.S. had "failed" to bring the parties together. Several papers noted the discrepancy evident in the NCP's initial insistence that it had not received an invitation. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Most of Khartoum's daily newspapers had front page coverage of the NCP's decision not to attend the Addis Ababa Ministerial with Secretary Rice, noting that the Government extended its "regrets" to

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the parties involved. Khartoum daily Akhbar Al Youm quoted Mutrif Siddig, MFA Under Secretary, as saying there was no way for the President and his two deputies, Vice presidents Kiir and Taha, to attend as they were presently involved in resolving outstanding CPA issues. Siddig was quoted as saying the NCP had no objections in principle to the U.S. initiative. However, the paper also quoted Ambassador Al Dirdeiri Mohamed Ahmed (one of the NCP's CPA negotiators and an Embassy contact) as saying that the Government does object to addressing the crisis outside the CPA's bilateral framework. Like many papers, Akhbar Al Youm specified that the SPLM delegation in Addis was to be led by Pagan Amum, and would include Deng Alor and Kosti Manibe, among others.

¶3. (U) Daily Al Rai Al Aam likewise noted the NCP's excuse that it was "preoccupied with many national concerns." The paper said the Secretary would be discussing other international Great Lakes issues

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besides the CPA.

¶4. (U) Al Sudani's headline states that "The U.S. Initiative Failed to Gather the Two Partners in Addis Ababa." The paper notes the NCP's "regrets," but also quotes comments by CDA Fernandez. It says the CDA "declined to comment" on the NCP's regrets, but that he said the U.S. seeks "to safeguard the peaceful process and progress in Sudan." In addition, Al Sudani noted the SPLM's stated intention to explain to the IGAD states in Addis its views on the causes of the current stalemate with the NCP. It said "the SPLM will work for urging these states to contribute in rescuing the CPA."

¶5. (U) Al Sudani notes that initially the NCP had insisted publicly that it had never received an invitation to the Addis conference. It then quotes CDA Fernandez as confirming that invitations had been extended to both parties.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: In the overall press coverage of the Addis Ministerial, the NCP does not come off well. While some newspapers seem to accept the ruling party's explanation of its decision not to

attend, the NCP's initial denial that it had received an invitation made its later public excuses less credible. The NCP's refusal to attend the Addis Ministerial is consistent with its strategy to prevent any "internationalization" of CPA implementation, and to insist that the impasse with the SPLM is a bilateral one best addressed within the framework of the CPA.

FERNANDEZ